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AUTHOR	Adler, Elaine F.
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ABSTRACT

The author, a consultant in English as a Second Language (ESL) in the New Jersey State Department of Education, emphasizes the need for inservice training in ESL. She points out that school personnel of many districts which she has observed purport to have ESL programs but actually are unaware that the teaching of ESL requires special training. Inservice training is only one aspect of a teacher-training program; preservice course work should be part of the college curriculum of every undergraduate with plans to teach children who do not speak English or a standard dialect of English. Not all teachers are suited for ESL, but all should have a foundation in language in order to reinforce the work of the specialist. To teach ESL efficiently and effectively requires an understanding of (1) the English language, (2) how to teach it, and (3) the pupil learning it. It also requires understanding how language learning is different from learning a skill such as addition or subtraction. Problems concerning the practical application of bilingual education, the difference between English as a second language and English as language arts for the reading teacher, and setting up an ESL program in a community are also highlighted. (AMM)

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NEW JERSEY STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
225 West State Street
P.O. Box 2019
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

BASIC CONCERNS OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN NEW JERSEY

By

Elaine F. Adler
Consultant in English as a Second Language

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Text of Speech

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BASIC CONCERNS
OF
TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

I am happy to have this opportunity to discuss the situation concerning teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in New Jersey today and what I view as the prospects and future needs for the field.

According to the latest survey, there are approximately 65,000 children in New Jersey, ages 3-18, who come from homes where a language other than English is spoken. These children live throughout the State with the greatest numbers in the heavily industrial Northeastern counties. The great majority of these children are Puerto Rican, while in one community, West New York, they are predominantly Cuban. In addition, many children are from Central and South America, as well as from most European countries.

As the Consultant in English as a Second Language on the staff of the New Jersey State Department of Education, my role is one of giving advice and help where requested. Unfortunately, school personnel of many districts which purport to have ESL programs are unaware that the teaching of ESL requires special training. Many ESL programs in operation are not as effective as they could be because the teachers lack such training. At the present time, only a few teachers have received any training at all, mostly on a short-term basis.

I earnestly beseech administrators to provide in-service ESL training programs for their staffs. The State Department of Education has already sponsored several workshops and has many

more planned for the future.

However, in-service training is only one aspect of a teacher-training program. Pre-service course work should be part of the college curriculum of every undergraduate with plans to teach children who do not speak English or a standard dialect of English. Such a curriculum would include courses in linguistics, methods of teaching English as a Second Language, and cultural anthropology. Although not all teachers are suited for ESL, all should have a foundation in language in order to reinforce the work of the specialist.

Why does this field require specialized training? Let's talk about the meaning of the expression "second language." A child for whom English is a second language must function in English from the moment he arrives in the continental United States. The sooner he can communicate effectively in English, the sooner he can become a part of the English-speaking world and, in this case, achieve success in school. To teach English efficiently and effectively, utilizing every moment for teaching and learning, requires an understanding of three principal areas: (1) the English language; (2) how to teach it; and (3) the pupil learning it. It also requires the understanding that language learning is different from learning a skill such as addition. In the latter case, an intellectual process, the pupil must understand what is happening; he must understand the concept of 1 + 1. Language learning is developing neuro-muscular patterns for speech and, to a degree, a habit-forming process, rather than an intellectual process. In addition, there is the psychological impact

because in learning a second language, the pupil has to view the world in a different way, in terms of the culture represented by the new language.

Without training, the teaching is casual and haphazard, with little control over what the pupil is learning. Not only are time and money being wasted, but more harm than good may be done by a willing but untrained teacher who may teach and reinforce what is not really part of the system of English.

One example of this lack of understanding of what the English language really is concerns the use of native speakers of Spanish as teachers of English where native speakers of English are readily available. Where a native speaker of Spanish does not control the sound, stress, and intonation patterns of English himself and speaks English with what is known as an accent, he can only teach his pupils to speak with those same errors of pronunciation, stress, and intonation which are not part of the system of English and, thereby, reinforces the accent the pupil would have naturally. The same applies to the structure system of English and to the ability to use informal, natural, conversational English.

However, just being a native speaker of English is not enough to do an efficient job. The teacher must follow a structured sequence of lessons prepared by qualified linguists. Well-sequenced materials are available but, in some instances, they should be adapted for the local situation in terms of what is relevant to particular students.

There is much misunderstanding over how a second language is learned. Today, as in the past, many teachers believe that learning a language is the process of memorizing long vocabulary lists and learning about the grammar of the language. Vast numbers of students exposed to a foreign language in high school, but who never could use the language, attest to the fact that this approach is far from satisfactory. Much more functional use of the new language is attained in a much shorter time by the language learner when he is able to internalize the basic rules governing the structure of the language and when vocabulary is held to a minimum. Children do not learn to speak English merely by sitting in a class where English is spoken. Have you ever been in a place where a strange language was spoken and where you didn't understand a word of it? How did you react? Did you just tune out? That's probably the natural reaction. Have you ever tried to learn a foreign language in a situation where that's all you heard all day long? Was it a relaxing situation for you? Well, it isn't for children either. They tune out, too, and when this happens, education is tuned out also. I have heard many teachers say that their students "speak English beautifully." Do these children really control the sound and structure systems of English appropriate to their level, or do they speak "pidgin" English which you've been accepting as adequate for communication? And how long is it before they learn to ask questions following the rules of English? Even if a child learns to speak English in one or two years, what about the work that he or

she has missed throughout the time English was being learned? Many children never catch up on the concept development and understandings which normally take place in the English-speaking classroom. This is where the need for bilingual classes arises.

For the State of New Jersey, at the present time, bilingual programs must be limited in scope because of the limited number of bilingual teachers available for such programs. Where native or near native speakers of Spanish are available, they should be used to teach the regular curriculum in Spanish, while ESL is taught during a set time each day by a native speaker of English. On the elementary level, the Spanish portion would include developmental activities for the most part, while in the junior and senior high schools, subject matter should be taught in Spanish. (Bilingual education, in terms of making all children bilingual, is a goal for the distant future).

However, as being a native speaker of English is not enough background for teaching ESL, being a native speaker of Spanish is not necessarily all that is required to teach in Spanish. Such a person should be trained and qualified to teach the assigned grade or subject area. In addition, such a person, if educated primarily in Latin America, should be familiar with the philosophy of the continental schools.

At this time, I must discuss another problem concerning non-English speaking children. Here we must distinguish between English as a second language and English as language arts. It is very nearly impossible to teach reading with understanding if the

child does not have the written patterns in his oral repertoire. Writing, basically, is speech written down, an attempt to approximate oral patterns. What the child can say, he can learn to read with understanding. Reading should be approached through experience expressed orally and written down, and not through basal readers.

Traditionally, our schools are book-oriented. All children have been expected to read to grade level, with teachers having to report that Book I was completed on this date, Book II was completed on that date, etc. As a result, many teachers find themselves caught in-between their own feelings about delaying formal reading and the established routine. On the other hand, many teachers feel secure in following the established routine regardless of whether or not the children actually can read the material with understanding.

Perhaps this point can be brought out more clearly by the fact that many non-English speaking children do not spend their first year of school in kindergarten, but rather are brought to school at age six and are placed in first grade where formal reading is normally begun. They miss the developmental and readiness activities of kindergarten. Many are commonly referred to as "disadvantaged" children which implies that oral development in their native language has not taken place on a par with other children, most of whom do enter kindergarten. School officials should make every effort to encourage parents to register their children for kindergarten, or to provide a substitute kindergarten program.

In setting up an ESL program of some sort, it is important that all school personnel, parents, and interested members of the community be informed as to the nature of the program and the rationale behind it. Without understanding the new approach, teachers may feel resentment at not being included, parents may object that their children are being held back from learning English, and taxpayers may feel concern for the way their money is being spent.

Funds are available for ESL programs through Titles I and III, ESEA. In addition, there is still the possibility of funds being appropriated through Title VII, The Bilingual Education Act. State funds should be made available to districts through Special Education, as non-English speaking children do have a communication handicap. However, where such funds are not readily available, much can be done with a district's own resources, financial and human. For example, where no extra classrooms are available, a form of team teaching can be utilized where one teacher in a grade may teach ESL to all the children in that grade, while her own class is working together with another class. Poll your teachers to see who would be interested in teaching ESL. Find out who your bilingual teachers are. If you don't have any, secure Spanish-speaking aides, especially for the primary grades. Again, the services of the State Department of Education are available to all districts to help organize a program. No two districts necessarily need the same type of program. But a program can be arranged using the best resources available.

The field of ESL is a relatively new one and trained personnel are greatly in demand. I suggest that experienced teachers, as well as beginners, take advantage of the full-time graduate study which is available at some of our leading colleges and universities.

Those of us who are deeply involved in and committed to this work welcome all who might be interested in joining us. The challenge is tremendous. Everything is new and there is so much to be done.

SUGGESTED

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